

Review: 22 Haviland Street Gallery presents work of David Gordon

By Abby Luby
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It's the yin of the trees and the yang of the poppies that illuminate the talents of painter David Gordon. Canvases of lofty, soft focus trees play off other canvases of red, frenetic poppies – all captivating, endearing, atmospheric, now on view at the 22 Haviland Street Gallery in South Norwalk.

Gordon's paintings in oils and acrylics on masonite board yield different textures and treatments. The plumed, sculptural trees are suffused into the surface and have a simple, almost soothing presence; the deep red poppies flush heatedly in a dance on the canvas. Here trees are cool, distant, complacent, while poppies are magnified, fiery, zig-zagged. The different tactile approaches highlight Gordon's ability to master the illusive and mysterious process of joining paint to surface.

Dark, thin tree trunks swish upward in painterly gestures in "Lemon Trees." Of the three buoyant mustard-toned trees, two are nuzzling each other and the one is aloof, off to the side. Tiny particulates of muted, stippled color render a reserved calm. In the smaller "Tree Baby 1," three tree trunks are suggested by wisps of dangling strings tethered to three merged, light olive tree canopies. The sinewy trunks span the large mid section of the canvas, rising from a thin strip of rough, scarlet emblazoned ground.

Shimmering and sweeping from the ground are the fuzzy, biomorphic "Plum Trees," larger-than-life plums on short, stem-like tree trunks. Dark edges with an inner light, the plums emit a subliminal buzz. In the large and stately work "Three Years From Now" rubbed in yellows with bristled edges reveal textures of the masonite board while brushed grays shift in and out over the deep purple-browns of the ground.

If the simply stated, precise trees are Gordon's reserved expression, then his paintings of poppies is where he lets loose. In the large painting "Hot Poppies," flaming flowers swirl in a red haze, teased up by a tangle of black, scraggly stems, arching and bent, rustling from a rough, barbed, under growth

Everything about this painting is hot – the thick, steamy air, humid wind and the arid sandy-peach sky overhead.

“Poppy Baby IV,” one of three small ‘baby poppy’ paintings, uses acrylic, pencil and oil. Scratches and swirls of a stealth underworld gurgle up the crimson flowers that whirl towards a pale pink sky. Short, delicate curved lines splice through the air.

“Journey” is the singular landscape without trees and is more about a sense of place. A wide, triangular opening dirt road at the base of the painting pulls us in to an expansive ocher field with tiny trees gracing on the horizon. Different textures accenting light and dark muted tones fuel abstract energy patterns that pedal in and out on the canvas. Combed lines merge the road into fields with small trees gracing the horizon.

That Gordon’s work is widely collected by corporations, museums and colleges and displayed in many banks, hospitals, and government offices world-wide attests to the appeal of uncomplicated, landscape elements. Although there is a “design” quality to the work, there is more than first meets the eye. Like the lingering finish from sipped wine, Gordon’s work re-registers as a sort of visual change up. The familiar tree-forms become part fantasy as pliable, bobbling balloon heads; the frenzied poppies give way to a ruckus, crazed undergrowth. The poppies are more about heat and heavy movement. For the trees, the inner voice reflecting the duality says “it’s a tree, but it’s not a tree.”

The work is tastefully hung at the 22 Haviland Street Gallery, a wonderful space that gives you the sense of how art would look in your home. The gallery is in three downstairs rooms of a residence and lends to a more intimate connection with the art.

The show is up until December 10, 2006 at 22 Haviland Street Gallery, South Norwalk.
Gallery hours are Fridays, 6-9, Saturdays and Sundays, 1-5
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